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Uses of the term NIMBY in the Italian press, 1992-2008

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Abstract

Uses of the term NIMBY ('not in my back yard') were analysed in the three main Italian newspapers between 1992 and 2008. In Study 1, a content analysis of 231 articles containing the term NIMBY showed two main views of the issues raised: one, aligned with the conventional view, according to which protesters are mainly driven by parochialism, emotionalism and ignorance, and the other consistent with the most innovative literature on this issue, which presents NIMBY conflicts as struggles for justice and democracy. Study 2, which adopted the discursive psychology perspective on the articles characterised by the co-occurrence of the words 'NIMBY' term and 'protest', confirmed those results. Overall, there are multiple and diverse portrayals of NIMBY conflicts in the Italian press; the idea that the press supports traditional views of such conflicts, is, in part, unfounded.

Key words: NIMBY; LULU; protest; mass media; bias;

Two main approaches to describing the opposition of local communities to the siting of unwanted facilities in their locality exist among scholars, in the mass media and in public opinion (Freudenberg & Pastor, 1992). Based on Roccato, Rovere, and Bo (2008), we label them “technocratic” and “participatory”.

The technocratic approach tends to view such oppositions negatively, labelling them NIMBY – “not in my back yard” (Beckmann, 1973), and charging them with: ignorance about the facilities’ technical features; irrationality and emotive reactions leading to anti-modern positions; and parochialism among people who refuse the building of the facilities in their locality because they are blinded by self-interest and lack a civic sense (Freudenberg & Pastor, 1992). Sometimes, these protesters are even charged with anti-democratically paralysing public policies and of being based on a “culture of veto” that brings BANANA (Build Absolutely Nothing Anywhere Near Anyone) positions. Although research has disconfirmed such postulates (e.g., della Porta & Piazza, 2007; McAvoy, 1998; Wolsink, 2000), the technocratic approach is still widely taken in the scientific debate and in the mass media.¹

According to the participatory approach, democracy and environmental and distributive justice are at stake in NIMBY conflicts (Carruthers, 2007). On the one hand, as concerns democracy, such conflicts are considered to be consequences of denial of the right of local citizens to participate in the decision-making process that leads to the siting of the unwanted facility in their locality (Gould, 1996; Rootes, 2007). In this light, such local protests are environmental movements structured on dense inter-organisational networks and shared collective identities (Diani & Rambaldo, 2007); furthermore, these protests stem from a democratic dilemma between representative and direct democracy and may help develop new conceptions of pluralism that are qualitatively distinct from the liberal pluralist model (Schlosberg, 2002). On the other hand, NIMBY conflicts stem from the attempt of human populations, who would bear a disproportionate share of the impact of environmental hazards due to racism or class discrimination, to more fairly distribute the costs and the benefits of an

unwanted facility (Pellow, 2002). From this perspective, these conflicts – which, far from being exclusively limited to defending parochial and local interests, are often struggling for new models of economic development (Lolive, 1997) – should be considered as voiced oppositions that mainly stem from reactions to the unfair and inadequately transparent decision making processes leading to the building of a locally unwanted facility.

Adhering to one or other of these two approaches may have consequences in that it leads lay people, administrators, and planners to support specific strategies to manage such local protests. In the best cases, people adhering to the technocratic approach tend to support strategies aimed at economically compensating communities for the unwanted siting of the facility. In the worst cases, they accept paternalistic models as being legitimate and efficient for managing NIMBY conflicts, including those labelled in the literature as DAD (Decide, Announce, Defend) (Kemp, 1992). These models site the unwanted facility without negotiating the decision with the local population and without considering political and technical criteria when deciding on how and where to site an unwanted facility (Gibson, 2005). By contrast, individuals adhering to the participatory approach support decisional strategies based on ECFD (Establish criteria, Consult, Filter, Decide) models. These models include the local population in every stage of the decision-making process about how and where to site the unwanted facility; the process is often lengthy, but potentially effective, and it is characterised by genuine negotiation, dialogue and involvement (McAvoy, 1998).

The way in which the public views NIMBY protests and chooses between one of these two models of managing the conflict largely depends on their own involvement in the conflict and on the information presented by the media. While residents systematically rely on direct knowledge, individuals living outside the community tend to rely on mass media accounts. The literature consistently shows that the role of the media in orienting the public debate is so stark that their accounts cannot be regarded as neutral vehicles for information. According to the literature on framing (e.g., Benford & Snow, 2000), the media should be conceived as actors

engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders, thereby spreading interpretive frames that have the function of focusing attention by bracketing and punctuating both relevant and irrelevant information. In this light, the media are deeply embroiled in the “politics of signification” (Hall, 1982).

Research shows that local opponents of facility siting consider the mass media as being far from neutral when presenting the reasons underlying their mobilisations. In their view, the media contribute to spreading a negative and stigmatising representation of local oppositions and legitimise DAD models of decision-making by unanimously supporting the technocratic approach (Caruso & Fedi, 2008). Consistently, opponents consider the mass media as components of the hostile and substantially undifferentiated outgroup to which the actors who proposed the building of the facility, the political institutions that favour it, and the economic actors who would gain from its construction also belong (Mannarini et al., 2008). Are these perceptions correct? Although some research has been conducted on the topic (e.g., Calafati, 2006; della Porta & Piazza, 2008; Lana & Mannarini, 2008), systematic analyses of the media’s use of the term NIMBY are still lacking. Thus, we performed two studies to evaluate the Italian media’s representation of the term.

Study 1

Goal

We aimed to identify the approach that the three main Italian newspapers (*La Repubblica*, *Il corriere della sera*, and *La stampa*) took when using the term NIMBY and to quantify their use in the articles that they published between 1992 and 2008.

Method

We downloaded from the newspapers’ on-line databases 231 articles that were

characterised by the occurrence of the term NIMBY in their title and/or in their text and were published between January 1, 1992 and December 31, 2008 (112 published by *La Repubblica*, 69 by *Il corriere della sera*, and 50 by *La stampa*). We then conducted a content analysis of the textual *corpus*, to identify its key themes. Nineteen coding categories (plus a residual category, occurring 31 times) were developed both theoretically (i.e., based on the literature cited above) and empirically (i.e., based on numerous close readings of the whole textual *corpus*). After independently coding the textual *corpus* using one or more codes per article, we discussed and resolved the few inconsistencies that existed between their categorisations. Table 1 identifies the coding categories we used and summarises their frequency. The frequency of category does not correspond to the number of articles because in some articles we used more than one code to categorise the use of the term NIMBY.

Results

The number of articles that included the term NIMBY increased from the early 1990s to the late 2000s. There was no association between the number of articles and the newspapers in which they were published (Table 2, $\chi^2(6) = 7.568, p = .271$). In more than half of the articles, the journalists' views were reported, without any differences in frequency of occurrence among the three newspapers (Table 3, $\chi^2(12) = 19.026, p = .088$). As shown in Table 1, categories referring to the technocratic approach prevailed in the articles (N=284), suggesting that the conflicts stem from the parochialism and the irrationality of the opponents adhering to an alarming veto culture. However, categories referring to the participatory approach covered 30.6% of the uses of NIMBY in the articles (N=125), mainly describing NIMBY conflicts as democratic dilemmas stemming from ineffective decision-making processes. There was no association between strictly adhering to one of the two approaches and the newspaper concerned ($\chi^2(2) = 1.945, p = .378$). In fact, 41 articles presented views that were consistent both with the technocratic and the participatory approaches. A logistic regression, using year of

publication, speaker (the journalist was used as the reference category) and newspaper (*La Stampa* was used as the reference category) as predictors, showed that only expressing an opponent's view significantly fostered the probability of publishing a "double-barrelled" article ($b = 1.077$, $ES = .515$, $p < .05$, Nagelkerke's pseudo $R^2 = .072$).

Another logistic regression, excluding such "double-barrelled" articles, was performed and supported our initial finding that expressing the view of an opponent was the only independent variable that influenced the probability of diffusing a view that was consistent with either the participatory or the technocratic approach ($b = 1.823$, $ES = .66$, $p < .01$, Nagelkerke's pseudo $R^2 = .212$).

Discussion

The study showed that, contrary to what is often believed by opponents of locally unwanted facilities (Caruso & Fedi, 2008), the Italian press does not unanimously present NIMBY conflicts in a manner that supports the technocratic approach. Without significant differences among the three main Italian newspapers, approximately one-third of the textual *corpus* that we analysed referred to the participatory approach when presenting such conflicts. The probability of adhering to this approach rose significantly when the article presented an opponent's view. However, the quantitative analyses we performed in this first study could not analyse the linguistic strategies used by the press to transmit the general attitudes, beliefs, judgments, and stereotypes about such local conflicts to the public. We evaluated this aspect of our research in a second qualitative study based on the discursive psychology (DP) approach (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

Study 2

Goal

We intended to analyse how the main Italian newspapers presented NIMBY conflicts and related movements between 1992 and 2008 to detect the interpretative repertoire deployed in discussions of such protests. Consistent with the DP perspective, we hypothesised that a variety of accounts were to be found in the press discourse on such conflicts, each of which performed a specific and different function. Relying on the assumption that knowledge is not sustained by its correspondence to an objective reality, DP posits that language simultaneously mediates and constructs our understanding of reality (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Individuals use their language to *do* things and for this reason an individual's account will vary according to its function, that is, to the purpose of his/her speech (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Hence, the same phenomenon can be described in a number of different ways, and the variation in the accounts is a consequence of people performing different acts through their speech. Accounts are constructed through what Wetherell and Potter (1988: 172) define as interpretative repertoires: 'building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena. Any particular repertoire is constituted out of a restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion'. These repertoires constitute one of the bases of the mental models that people use to represent, explain and evaluate their social world (Van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).

Method

From the textual *corpus* that we analysed in Study 1, we selected the 38 articles, published between January 1, 1992 and December 31, 2008 (17 published by *La Repubblica*, 12 by *Il corriere della sera*, and 9 by *La Stampa*), that were characterised by the co-occurrence of the words "NIMBY" and "protest" in their title and/or in their text. As Wetherell and Potter (1988) suggested, we repeatedly read the *corpus* in search of recurrent schemas and structures, and we coded it using an inductive approach. From the 38 articles, we extrapolated 154 excerpts that were coded into 24 mutually exclusive categories (Table 4). Based on Burke (2005), we first

selected fragments of the text that had a bearing on our research question. Subsequently, we examined the text in relation to how the language was used to construct the ideas of information, and we searched for variability, i.e., inconsistencies of meaning in the constructions and the assumptions that they revealed.² Finally, we highlighted the implications of the most relevant accounts. Consistent with DP assumptions, we made no attempt at quantification. Instead, our aim was to detect the main ways in which protests characterised as ‘NIMBY’ are constituted and to suggest some of the functions that these uses serve. Given the results of Study 1, we did not differentiate among newspapers when performing our analyses.

Results

To present the various facets of the repertoire of representing NIMBY protests in a comprehensible structure, we grouped the different accounts into three broad categories, each of which was constructed as a dyad of opposed concepts (i.e., particular vs. general interests, emotionalism vs. rationality, threatened vs. improved democracy). The first component of each dyad presented NIMBY movements in a negative light and the second component in a positive light. As will be shown below, two coherent views of local oppositions stemmed from the combination of these dyads.

Particular vs. general interest

The following extract referred to the protest in the Susa Valley against the building of a high-speed railway (HSR) and presents NIMBY protests as resulting from defensive and self-interested attitudes.

31.5 [*La Repubblica*, November 2, 2005, journalist speaking] It is easy, at a distance, to brand the Susa Valley rebellion as a fit of populism or parochialism, as a manifestation of interested and preconceived—that is to say ideological—hostility against what is new and modern. When none of us is directly concerned or threatened, we all support progress, technology, experimentation, and innovation, unless these things disturb our life or the life of our family: It is the well-known NIMBY syndrome.

This assertion, which seems outwardly to empathise with the local opponents, ends up stigmatising them, by emphasising that the protest aimed to preserve the opponents' well-being, to the detriment of that of the wider collectivity. Egoism, ideologism, parochialism and the refusal of modernity, though initially denied, were reaffirmed and stood out as the principal attributes ascribed to the NIMBY opposition.

To highlight the negative nature of NIMBY oppositions, generic assertions and vivid descriptions were used to define such protests, as in the following account, which anchors the report on a local protest against the reopening of a dump in the image of 'faith' (extract 13.1).

13.1 [*La Stampa*, May 27, 2007, journalist speaking] The Lord and all the Saints, with Saint Vito—patron of the mentally ill—heading the procession, the Virgin Mary and the angels, in brief the whole heavenly court, and the earthly court of priests, the shepherds of the herd, are here, before the gates of the decontaminated dump of Parapoti, lined up in visible and invisible rows by Rosetta's [leader of opposition] side and the poor wretches of Montecorvino Pugliano and Rovella, Macchia, and San Vito [municipalities of the surrounding area], in between the slopes covered with olive trees and the hill of disgust.

The account, besides transmitting a colourful representation of the protest, used the discursive device of vivid description to construct the event as a *fact*. Thus, this description nourished the stereotype of the "ignorant and superstitious opposition".

Contrary to these negative portrayals of local protests, alternative, positive interpretations emerged from other accounts, according to which the NIMBY label was inappropriate.

Extracts, such as the following, show signs of the existence of this different perspective.

14.3 [*La Stampa*, February 11, 2007, journalist speaking] As politically "modern" as the use of the term NIMBY may sound, by dint of using it we risk being on a wrong track. The issue raised by the people in Vicenza has a broader scope: It has already catalysed interests that go beyond the localistic ones.

This extract presents the issues raised by the local opponents protesting against the enlargement of the U.S. military base in Vicenza as attempts to achieve a general scope that affected the collectivity at large. Such an account presents the local movements as aimed at pursuing the common good and rejects the negative portrayal previously presented and the

correlated charges of particularism. To some extent, the alternative account seemed to recognise a typical evolution of NIMBY movements, often likely to metaphorically “enlarge their own backyard”. Such a shift, referred to as climb in generality (Lolive, 1997) or grievance extension (Gordon & Jasper, 1996), modifies the focus of their claims by shifting from the defence of a single territory to that of the quality of life and even to the proposal of alternative models of development.

Emotionalism vs. rationality

Another negative characteristic associated with NIMBY oppositions is emotionalism. This attribute was explained through two different accounts. On the one hand, emotionalism was traced back to the excessive involvement of opponents. Presented as being driven by strong selfish motivations and by negative emotions elicited by the perception of being threatened, opponents were considered to be stubbornly defending their personal interests at all costs, irrespective of a rational assessment of the costs and the benefits.

15.3 [*La Stampa*, January 10, 2007, journalist speaking] It is true, the tone of positions on the high-speed railroad project is usually “emotional”. But I think I can forestall the reply of people involved. They would say: “Sure, what if you were in our place?”

In contrast, emotionalism was attributed to a dearth of essential information, which communicated to the readers that the protesters were ignorant and that their claims were insufficiently well-grounded.

15.2 [*La Stampa*, January 10, 2007, journalist speaking] As for many other things in life and politics, opinions should be expressed on the base of analytical information.

Finally, an aprioristic tendency of protest movements towards an unjustified opposition was diagnosed as a distinctively Italian cultural feature (e.g., “the culture of veto”, extract 1.1; “the ‘veto party’ that paralyses Italy”, extract 7.1), which would lead people to refuse in principle any kind of change.

Emotionalism, irrationality, ignorance and prejudice were, in brief, the main characteristics of this particular portrayal of NIMBY movements. Such a discursive construction contributed

to depicting opponents as unreasoning actors who lacked valid arguments for protesting. However, an alternative representation emerged, according to which local oppositions would rationally ground their negative opinions toward the unwanted facility in the following ways: a realistic assessment of risks, costs and benefits involved in the building of the facility; the denunciation of the private interests hidden behind the apparent defence of the public interest, and; the perception that an injustice was perpetrated in the decision-making process.

The possession of in-depth knowledge of and the references to criteria for risk assessment constituted the direct “reply” to the charges of ignorance and irrationality attributed to NIMBY movements. In the following extract, according to the journalist, the list of harmful effects that the construction of the HSR would entail for the Susa Valley community makes the argument particularly effective and powerful. Moreover, the rhetorical use of images such as “heaven” and “hell” to highlight the contrast between the present and the future helps to anchor the factual matters in an emotional base and makes the argument more vivid and persuasive.

31.3 [*La Repubblica*, November 2, 2005, journalist speaking] The arguments against [the HSR] are objectively numerous and well-founded. The danger of releasing quantities of asbestos and uranium contained in the Susa Valley mountains, this being the region which holds the Italian record for cancer deaths. The further wound inflicted to a geographical area that already bears a railroad, a motorway and two highways. And finally the costs (21 billion Euros for an infrastructure that will be finished in 2018) are perceived as excessive and disproportionate. For at least fifteen years, before a tunnel can be opened in the bowels of the mountain, the life of the whole Valley will be upset by the inexorable advance of bulldozers, caterpillar tractors, and trucks, and that small earthly heaven will fatally turn into hell.

Similarly, the denunciation of private interests concealed behind the defence of the public interest negated the charge of particularism.

22.1 [*La Repubblica*, May 16, 2008, journalist speaking] As usual, even if too late, your sins will find you out. On the one hand the needs of people, on the other hand the pure private interest, clumsily masked as a campaign for relaunching the image of the city.

Substantially consistent with the scientific literature (e.g., Tyler, 2000), the perception that a social and an environmental injustice was perpetrated to the detriment of local communities

shaped up at the following three different levels: the procedural level, resulting from the unfair procedures used in building the facility (extract 34.4.); the distributive level, resulting from an unfair distribution of costs (extract 35.3), and ; the relational level, resulting from the unsatisfactory nature of the relationship between the proponents and the communities (extract 4.7).

34.4 [*La Repubblica*, November 20, 2003, journalist speaking] Any region, city or town forced overnight to host a waste disposal plant would probably rise with the same fury. This is what has been termed “the NIMBY syndrome” [...]. Yet there is no doubt that the lack of information and transparency about the procedures used, the criteria adopted for choosing the site, and above all the safety conditions for residents, have fuelled the rebellion.

35.3 [*La Repubblica*, November 15, 2003, opponent speaking] “All means are legal. Basilicata [region of Southern Italy] does not deserve such a treatment: There are already big problems of unemployment to deal with. Building the waste disposal plant in this area would seriously jeopardize tourism and make it collapse”.

4.7 [*Corriere della sera*, February 24, 2007] “The majority of people living in Vicenza are against the military base, that’s it. They feel they have been fooled by the government, which has treated them as schoolboys. “We feel misrepresented”. This is the most interesting and hot part of the demonstration.

Thus, procedural, relational, and distributive environmental justice were presented as valid arguments for mobilising and for strengthening the legitimacy and the soundness of protest.

Threatened vs. improved democracy

Similarly to the facets of the repertoire illustrated hitherto, the third aspect also revolved around a dichotomy. A negative version depicted NIMBY demonstrations as dangerous events for democracy and social order. Danger and violence are explicitly evoked in accounts such as the following.

9.6 [*Corriere della sera*, November 16, 2005, journalist speaking] We hope that in the Susa Valley the situation will not degenerate into a breeding ground for spirals of conflict that would be difficult to manage. The recent parcel bombs and intimidatory bullets constitute alarming signs.

Even in the cases in which the public nuisance was not described with such alarming traits and was not postulated to have intentionally subverted society, protest was considered “objectively” responsible for creating confusion and disorder.

29.2 [*La Repubblica*, March 4 2006, journalist speaking] And now we have been confirmed that unaware citizens can throw the city into chaos, multiplying out of all proportion the effects resulting from the irresponsible profits and the unsuccessful care of services under a monopoly system.

In addition, the NIMBY protests were referred to as an “unsolvable problem” (extract 35.2) from which “there is no escape” (extract 19.1) and as an annoying issue to deal with by the terms “a time bomb” (extract 21.1), “a trouble” (extract 21.6), or “a hot potato” (extract 35.3). In each case, local opponents were likely to appear as an uncomfortable eventuality in the eyes of political institutions.

An alternative perspective on the relationship between citizens and government, based on a positive view of the oppositions, presents NIMBY protests as an expression of a new need for participation and a more inclusive, fully developed democracy in the following extracts.

2.2 [*Corriere della sera*, July 7, 2007, journalist speaking] [Local oppositions]—compensating for the absence of local movements, circles, party’s local branches, and associations (of which once there were plenty of in Milan, but which have now disappeared)—counterbalance the tendency to make decisions without consulting others.

9.1 [*Corriere della sera*, November 16, 2005, journalist speaking] What kind of game is being played on the Lyon-Turin HSR? The feeling is that it is a partly new game, with uncertain outcomes..., which is likely to throw into crisis the usual mechanisms from which political decisions draw their legitimacy.

26.3 [*La Repubblica*, February 19, 2007, journalist speaking] The truth is that that the march has taken in a variety of requests and experiences that have no political representation, especially in the left-wing coalition. Not only the needs of the extreme left groups... I refer mostly to requests and experiences that are locally-based, as in the case of the new U.S. military base in Vicenza.

Similar accounts highlighted that NIMBY opposition provides a new frame for the local-national relationship, mainly by: taking note of an empty space left by politics (extract 2.2.); expressing a currently unfulfilled need for democratic representation, currently (extract 26.3),

and ; questioning the traditional devices of representative democracy (extract 9.1). From such a perspective, the NIMBY movements simultaneously voiced the opponents' "willingness to participate" (extract 15.5) and their unwillingness to "passively suffer" (extract 27.2) as a consequence of an inefficient representative democracy. Both of these claims suggested that the NIMBY movements were fighting to enlarge the country's democratic foundation.

Discussion

As in Study 1, we refuted local opponents' idea that the Italian press monolithically adheres to the technocratic approach when representing NIMBY conflicts. Indeed, we outlined two main accounts of local opposition, each resulting from a different combination of the following three conceptual dyads: particular vs. general interests, emotionality vs. rationality, and threatened vs. improved democracy. Based on Kemp (1992), we may label them as "exclusive" or "inclusive". The first account, which was consistent with local opponents' representation of the mass media, was aligned with the conventional view of NIMBY conflicts (Beckmann, 1973), according to which protesters are driven by parochialism and emotionalism, and that they threaten democracy. The second account presented local oppositions in a positive light, as being concerned with general interests, which are based on a rational, in-depth knowledge of the potential negatives following the building of the unwanted installation, and as attempting to improve an unsatisfactory representative democracy through the "injection" of relevant doses of direct democracy. We will discuss the pragmatic effects of these two interpretative repertoires below.

General discussion

As a whole, our studies showed that in Italy there are multiple and diverse portrayals of the local opposition to facility siting and that the idea, shared by the local opponents, that the press monolithically supports the technocratic, stigmatising views of such conflicts, which

present the opponents as egoistic, irrational, reactionary, and uninterested in the common good, is, in part, a prejudiced conception. Approximately one-third of the *corpus* that we analysed presented the issues in such conflicts as adhering to the most advanced approach available at present, which considers such conflicts to be democratic dilemmas that stem from environmental and distributive injustices and that stem from the use of inadequate strategies for deciding where and how to build facilities that may be locally unwanted. The second qualitative study substantially confirmed these results. The convergence of these results, which stem from analyses performed based on different methods, strengthens our conclusions.

What are the practical consequences of spreading such views? In spreading the technocratic conception, the mass media are likely to induce changes in public opinion, which result in three consequences. First, they cause the development of mistrustful attitudes towards the opponents, thereby establishing a vicious circle of suspicion that prevents the actors from carefully considering the validity of the reciprocal arguments (Roccato et al. 2008). Second, they cause the stigmatisation of oppositions as (merely) ‘NIMBY’ and, as a consequence, promote the acceptance of paternalistic models as being legitimate and efficient for managing such conflicts (Kemp, 1992). Third, they increase the risk of fostering the proliferation among opponents of “paranoid social cognitions” (Kramer, 1998), which result from opaque decision-making processes involved in such models (Kemp, 1992). Paranoid social cognitions comprise hypervigilant and ruminative modes of information processing and are biased cognitive processes that are used to cope with a threatening environment in which expectations have been violated or in which there are no suitable and promptly available schemas for understanding what is happening. As Russo (2009) showed, the spread of paranoid social cognitions among residents tends to trigger NIMBY protests and to increase their radicalism.

When describing such protests in terms of the participatory approach, the press positively represents local oppositions as concerned with general interests that are based on a sensible, in-depth knowledge of the negative consequences that may follow the building of the unwanted

installation and that attempt to improve an unsatisfactory representative democracy through the “injection” of relevant doses of direct democracy. At first glance, this account seemed to be consistent with the more innovative literature on NIMBY conflicts (McAvoy, 1998), in that it substantially presented—even if often somewhat implicitly—the local mobilisations as struggles for environmental justice (Tyler, 2000). By spreading this view, the mass media plausibly had the practical effect of increasing readers’ awareness about alternative approaches for the management of such local conflicts, which are based on negotiation, dialogue and involvement (Kemp, 1992). These approaches proved to be the most effective at managing the NIMBY conflicts (McAvoy, 1998). However, the conflicts were never presented as arising, at least in part, from psychological ties between opponents and their communities (Mannarini et al. 2009). Thus, they were never represented as specific forms of place-protective actions, which arise when individuals perceive relevant environmental changes as threats to their place identity and as generating disruption in social and psychological bonds between individuals and their community (Devine-Wright 2009, Garavan 2007).

Italian newspaper accounts of these local movements used a variety of rhetorical strategies to increase the persuasive power of information and make them sound like “facts”. Systematic vagueness contradicted by vivid descriptions, along with the use of symbols and emblematic terms with strong emotional meanings, were the most recurrent devices that we detected. Whereas the first stratagem resulted in general statements that were difficult to either confirm or disconfirm (Calafati, 2006), the second stratagem elicited emotional reactions from readers, which served as an effective strategy for orienting their attitudes and decisions (Westen, 2007).

Finally, our research identified a cognitive distortion in addition to the other biases, all of which, according to the literature, are systematically active among both the opponents and the non-opponents in such local conflicts, who tend to live in incompatible universes of reference and to reason using incompatible logics. These biases prevent the groups from enlarging their

respective views and from understanding the rationale behind the other's arguments. This reduces the chances of successful dialogue and negotiation (Roccato et al. 2008). On the one hand, this is due to the "false consensus" effect (Ross, Green, & House, 1977), in the communities where the unwanted installation is to be built, both the opponents and those in favour of the installation systematically overestimate the numbers of the people who share their attitude (Campana et al. 2007). Alternatively, both the opponents and those in favour of the installation tend to represent the other side as inadequately informed, even if empirical data systematically show the lack of association between knowledge of the unwanted facility and attitudes towards it (Kraft & Clary, 1991). An additional distortion at play in such conflicts was that the opponents' perceptions that bias was an intrinsic feature of the media's representations of the protests (Mannarini et al. 2008) is, in part, unfounded. This cognitive distortion is consistent with two families of results from studies done on intergroup relations. Firstly, research on ingroup overexclusion (Yzerbyt et al. 1995) showed that individuals who strongly identify with their ingroup, which is systematically the case among the local opponents (Mannarini et al., 2009), tend to be cautious when deciding whether an individual belongs to their ingroup or not. Due to their strong motivation to avoid erroneously "contaminating" their ingroup by including outgroup members, they prefer to risk a "false negative" to a "false positive" mistake. Secondly, research on terror management theory (Pyszczynski et al. 2000) showed that when individuals feel threatened, which systematically happens to local opponents of unwanted facility siting (see Wolsink, 2000), in addition to enhancing their psychological investment in their ingroup, they tend to cognitively emphasise the ingroup/outgroup dichotomy (Castano et al. 2002) and to consider the outgroup as particularly homogeneous. Moreover, Castano, Sacchi, and Gries (2003) showed that when individuals consider their outgroup to be an enemy, they are more likely to perceive it to be homogeneous and to recognise it as threatening. This vicious circle, between feeling threatened by an outgroup and perceiving it as homogeneous, may plausibly contribute to increasing the radicalism of local

protests. *Ad hoc* studies aimed at systematically analysing the cognitive distortions that affect the representations of the opposition (media included) in such local conflicts could provide useful indications for their constructive management.

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Notes

1. In the most innovative literature the stigmatising label 'NIMBY' has been substituted by the LULU (Locally Unwanted Land Uses) label, which is neutral from the evaluative standpoint (Freudenberg & Pastor, 1992). However, in the public debate such oppositions are still labelled NIMBY. As our paper analyses the mass media presentation of such protests, in this paper we will use the NIMBY label. However, consistent with Rootes (2007), our use of the term NIMBY is simply descriptive, and is not intended to charge opponents with the stigma of ignorance, irrationality, and parochialism.
2. Limited space precludes us from reporting all the excerpts here. Readers interested in examining them may contact the corresponding author.

Table 1. Categories used in the content analysis

Category	Example	Technocratic approach	Participatory approach
Parochialism	“We have to be free to put in practice our projects without becoming slaves of the NIMBY syndrome, which wins every time one has to build a coal-burning power plant”, <i>La Stampa</i> , October 22, 2006	N = 117	
Irrationality	“The NIMBY syndrome made our already severe dependence on energy importation worse. Thus, we have lost 25% of the potential investments”, <i>La Stampa</i> , January 6, 2006	N = 54	
Veto culture	“We have to defeat the culture of veto”, <i>Il corriere della sera</i> , September 9, 2008	N = 36	
Used to stigmatize other mobilizations	“NIMBY effect? No to more power plants in my region? No. No reverse gear on our energy policy”, <i>Il corriere della sera</i> , October 22, 2008	N = 26	
Lack of civic sense	“It’s surely far from any civic sense to behave as if the town was an open-pit dump and not everybody’s territory, to be preserved and protected”, <i>La Repubblica</i> , November 12, 2008	N = 14	
Paralysis	“We want to develop effective tools to	N = 12	

	eliminate the paralysis stemming from NIMBY forever”, <i>La Stampa</i> , August 26, 2006		
Against modernity	“How is it possible that because of the odd ideas of a handful of people a whole nation should be left behind?”, <i>Il corriere della sera</i> , November 30, 2005	N = 8	
Reactionary	“To give free access to strangers here, without adequate housing policies, is exploitation and ghettoization”, <i>La Repubblica</i> , July 26, 2008	N = 7	
In favour of compensations	“The communist mayor, Pietro Rossetti, a gentleman, promised to compensate for the damage stemming from the building of a switchboard close to the river”, <i>Il corriere della sera</i> , September 25, 2008	N = 5	
Anti-democratic	“Majority rule has been abolished by the coup we described”, <i>La Stampa</i> , July 06, 2007	N = 3	
Aspecific stigmatization	“We should criticize those who always say No, the environmentalism of those who oppose the construction of a new railroad, the local interests, and the NIMBY syndrome”, <i>La Repubblica</i> , June 30, 2007	N = 2	

In favour of ECFD strategies	“We would be crazy to refuse a nuclear plant in Caorso, but we have to involve the people in our decision, discuss with the local government and create consensus”, <i>Il corriere della sera</i> , September 25, 2008		N = 32
Consequence of a non-inclusive decision	“The tough shortcut based on force is often an ineffective strategy”, <i>La Stampa</i> , July 07, 2008		N = 32
Democratic dilemma	“This protest is the demonstration of the distance between the political class and the people it should represent. There is a cross-section of the constituency which feels excluded, not represented by an oligarchy who is just interested in taking up”, <i>Il corriere della sera</i> , February 24, 2007		N = 20
Struggles for communities’ environment and quality of life	“The opponents bear a specific protest against the negative effects of the new railway on their environment, health and quality of life”, <i>Il corriere della sera</i> , November 6, 2005		N = 16
Consequence of environmental and/or distributive injustice	“We already have a dump, a refinery and a refugee camp”, <i>Il corriere della sera</i> , March 10, 2007		N = 11

Concerned with non-local problems	“Just a small part of what it is happening has a parochialistic basis”, <i>Il corriere della sera</i> , December 14, 1005		N = 6
Mobilizations against non transparent economic interests	“They struggle against situations submitted to the tantrums, or fashions, or prevailing interests of the moment, presented as captivating urban projects, and disguising the exploitation of the territory as a service for the community”, <i>La Repubblica</i> , February 24, 2008		N = 4
In favour of new models of economic development	“A new model of economic development, cross-cutting the political lines, is rising here”, <i>La Repubblica</i> , December 12, 2004		N = 4
TOTAL		N = 284	N = 125

Table 2. Number of the articles including the word NIMBY by year of publication

Year	Frequency
1992-2002	6
2003-2004	24
2005-2006	89
2007-2008	112
Total	231

Table 3. Speaker

Speaker	Frequency
Journalist	122
National politician	25
Local administrator	22
Opponent	20
Expert/scientist	17
Facility proponent	16
Reader writing to the journal	9
Total	231

Table 4. Categories and excerpts

	Excerpts	
Community	5	(2.1, 11.1, 24.3, 26.8, 36.5)
Emotionalism	4	(15.1, 15.2, 15.3, 28.2)
Conflict management	10	(8.3, 8.4, 10.3, 11.3, 19.2, 19.4, 21.4, 23.1, 23.6, 24.1)
Injustice	8	(4.8, 5.4, 19.3, 34.3, 34.4, 35.1, 36.4, 37.7)
Interests	6	(2.5, 9.4, 17.2, 22.1, 31.6)
“Isms” (egoism, ideology, racism, parochialism)	16	(2.4, 3.4, 4.4, 5.3, 7.4, 9.5, 11.2, 16.1, 23.5, 23.7, 24.2, 25.2, 25.3, 31.5, 33.1, 37.4)
Against development	9	(7.3, 9.7, 14.2, 22.3, 28.1, 31.1, 31.2, 31.4, 31.7)
Penalization	9	(3.5, 16.3, 23.3, 32.2, 34.5, 35.3, 36.2, 37.1, 37.3)
Pervasiveness	8	(3.2, 9.2, 12.2, 12.4, 12.5, 19.1, 25.1, 35.2)
Politics	15	(2.2, 4.5, 4.7, 9.1, 13.6, 14.4, 14.5, 15.4, 22.2, 24.4, 26.3, 26.4, 26.5, 37.2, 37.6)
Responsibility	5	(3.6, 21.1, 34.1, 37.5, 38.3)
Climb in generality	3	(9.3, 14.3, 18.4)
Risks	4	(9.4, 23.2, 31.3, 34.2)
Veto	8	(1.1, 1.2, 2.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 7.1, 32.3)
Voice	6	(10.4, 10.5, 15.5, 26.6, 26.7, 27.2)
Alarmism	9	(4.1, 4.2, 8.2, 9.6, 18.1, 18.2, 18.3, 30.1, 30.2)
Social chaos	2	(29.1, 29.2)
Outcomes	2	(12.1, 17.1)

Heterogeneity	9	(4.3, 4.6, 4.9, 14.1, 20.1, 21.3, 26.1, 26.2, 32.1)
“The brigands”	3	(5.1, 5.2, 5.5)
“The faithful”	2	(13.1, 13.4)
Metaphors for protest	3	(21.2, 21.6, 35.3)
Brawl	2	(12.3, 12.6)
Clashes	6	(8.1, 13.2, 13.3, 13.5, 21.5, 33.2)
Total	154	
